



# Young Adult Service on the Public Library Organization Chart

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THE MATERIAL IN THIS ARTICLE is based largely on thirty-two answers to questions posed on thirty-five questionnaires sent to library directors in public libraries in nineteen states. Since each respondent did not answer every question, the answers do not always total thirty-two. The states are in all the major geographical areas of the country and the libraries range from the largest down to one serving a population of 163,000. In the opinion of informed practitioners in public library young adult service, the libraries queried are for the most part recognized as leaders in the field. The information obtained from the questionnaires can be said to represent trends in the organization of public library young adult service in the more progressive libraries.

A canvass of the existing literature on the organization of young adult services in public libraries shows a meager scattering of articles and chapters in books on public library administration. Even this literature reveals little about the degree of importance attached to young adult work by administrators, the place of the service in the institutional hierarchy, organizational relationships, staffing, budget, objectives, services, or ages covered.

Some of the most significant items in the literature are discussed below:

*Young Adult Services in the Public Library*, issued by the American Library Association in 1960, urges, "In large public libraries or systems, work with young adults should be organized as a specialized service on the same basis as work with children or work with adults, with the head of the service responsible to the director of the library."<sup>1</sup>

*Minimum Standards for Public Library Systems*, 1966, another Edwin Castagna is Director, Enoch Pratt Free Library, Baltimore, Maryland.

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American Library Association publication, suggests, "At least five percent of . . . annual additions should be materials of specific interest to young adults."<sup>2</sup>

*Practical Administration of Public Libraries* by Joseph L. Wheeler and Herbert Goldhor, in its brief discussion of this area, indicates that, "Experience in young adult work has pointed up a few principles, but as yet no one pattern applicable to all communities. Service to young adults should be organized in connection with the adult departments and not with the children's department."<sup>3</sup>

*Local Public Library Administration* edited by Roberta Bowler includes less than three pages on "Service to Young Adults,"<sup>4</sup> some of which is quoted from *Young Adult Services in the Public Library*.

Although there is not much in the literature on form and structure, the writers in the field, mostly young adult librarians, have expressed themselves on the subject of the work with enthusiasm and evangelistic fervor. However, the concern in this paper is with organization. So we turn to the administrators of public libraries to get the organizational facts from their responses to the questionnaire. The return of the questionnaires from almost all who received them is in itself an indication of considerable interest.

The most telling fact about the relative importance administrators attach to work with young adults is the presence or absence of an agency for that service, with a supervisor in charge, within the library. Of the thirty-two completed questionnaires, twenty-seven indicated the existence of an agency with a supervisor. Only three reported negatively. This seems to show an overwhelming consensus on the importance of the work with young adults. As to the title of the head of young adult services, the one most used is coordinator, with a great variety of other titles reported.

Another indication of the importance of young adult work is the placement within the library organization. The questionnaires showed that about half of the young adult heads report to either the director or assistant director; sixteen such situations were reported. In the other cases reporting was to supervisors at lower levels. So there is also evidence of the importance many administrators attach to young adult service.

Inter-organizational relationships are also significant in assessing the place of a service in the library. The libraries questioned were asked about the relationships of the young adult head to children's services and references services. The pattern showed a relationship

with these services that was almost always cooperative, and in about half the cases consultative. Only in three or four cases was there no relationship.

The allocation of funds to a service is an indication of relative importance in the organization. More than half of those responding (seventeen) indicated a separate young adult materials budget, as against thirteen without such a separate budget. These young adult budgets showed a range in allocation from a high of 15 percent of the materials budget down to zero percent. The budget percentages clustered around 3 percent.

In order to determine the kind of young adult services and collections represented, the libraries were asked to respond on whether the young adult services included readers' advisory or consultant services and whether there were separate collections in the central library and in branches with librarians in charge. About half (fifteen) of the respondents indicated a reader's advisory or consultant function. Twenty-one indicated separate collections in the central library with a librarian in charge. Branches were reported by twenty-two as having separate collections, and fourteen reported a librarian in charge of the collections and services at branches.

There was a fairly wide variation of age coverage, running from a low of twelve years to a high of twenty. Most of the libraries responding begin young adult services at ages thirteen or fourteen and end at seventeen to nineteen.

Young adult librarians are often concerned with the relation of their services to the educational programs of the schools. The question was asked whether the age group served by the public library young adult service should be influenced by the organization of the local schools, especially whether there should be a tie-in with the junior high or some other arrangement of the schools by age. There was a fifteen to twelve return against determining the age by the organization of the local schools. Twenty-four would exclude junior college students while six would include them.

Another very significant factor in determining the organizational importance of work with young adults is the relative growth of the services. The librarians questioned were asked, "Please comment briefly on the trends in young adult services, among the libraries in your state over the past ten years. Is there growth, dwindling, stability?"

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There was overwhelming agreement that the service is growing. From a California library came the following answer:

"California libraries are growing in recognition of young adult services, but the extent and quality vary so widely that 'stability' hardly applies.

"Young adults themselves are growing away from specialized service, particularly segregated areas. Most high school students gravitate to the total adult collection; it is the younger (ninth grade and below) student using separate areas."

From New York state a response, confirmed by other New York librarians, stated, "Y.A. services are stronger, due to the growth and influence of library systems where consultants are available to member libraries."

From Maryland, where the Enoch Pratt Free Library of Baltimore has stressed work with young adults for many years, there is evidence of strong young adult service in a number of the larger county libraries and in one area library. It was suggested that there would be greater growth "if the service were fostered by the state library division." A state consultant was proposed.

From Florida came the comment, "Major libraries in the state seem to be engaged in or developing young adult services."

From Massachusetts: "No pronounced organizational change in libraries, but there has been a growth in interest in ways Y.A.'s can be effectively served. This interest has resulted in a greater number of special programs directed to Y.A.'s and their parents; experiments in the use of paperbacks to reach Y.A. users; the initiation of professional meetings on regional level for reviewing of adult books for teenagers; a new Young Adult Round Table; inclusion of Y.A. courses in state and private colleges; attention to Y.A. area in professional, regional and state library meetings."

Against this evidence from some states of the growth in importance of work with young people, there is contrary testimony from Oklahoma: "A separate young adult service has not developed in many libraries. No strong trend toward such a pattern is appearing." A medium-sized library in New Jersey said about the status of work with young adults, "It has always been poor." This same library claimed the largest active youth department in the state and went on to say, "Newark is only partially professionally staffed. Other than that there are only a few true youth librarians in the state." Similar

negative comment came from Indiana: "It seems there is less emphasis. Young adults are using adult materials in assignments and probably for personal interest." One Massachusetts library reports:

We are phasing out young adult services as such in this library. We feel that the young adult is better served by the Adult Department. His needs can be taken care of by good advisory services from the adult staff. In my own opinion, in the course of the last ten years, school assignments for young readers have become more and more technical and specialized and more time consuming for everyone involved. We feel that the sooner the young adult is integrated into the Adult Department the better. We serve his recreational needs through the Adult Department not only through the use of the "white dot" collections, but also through the regular adult collections. We interfile the young adult books with the adult collections and we integrate the young adult readers with the adult readers. We are training the children's staff to refer young adult readers, that is everyone age 11 and up, to the Adult Department, and we are training the adult staff to treat them as adults rather than as young people with special problems.

This roundup of attitudes offers a mixed picture. Some very thoughtful librarians go against the majority view that young adult work is increasing in importance as a separate specialized field. However, it would probably be a mistake to interpret these comments negatively as regards the importance of the service to young adults. The dissent is on the matter of the place of the service in the library organization rather than on its value.

The final query on the questionnaire asked, "Please give your own views in a few sentences on any organizational aspect of young adult service not covered above or upon which you feel strongly." About half of the returns included a response to this question.

From a large library in the Middle West it was stated, "In general I am pretty much of the opinion that Y.A. work in our library is best carried on in the hands of the adult librarians; we need to increase their awareness, however, of Y.A. needs and aspirations." This respondent reports on the good results coming from a list of forty paperback titles bought in depth for one branch library. Seventeen copies of *Catcher in the Rye* were added to the collection of a branch with with an annual circulation of under 100,000. The librarian responsible for this multiplication of a popular title is credited with reversing a downward circulation trend, and it was noted that "teenagers are be-

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ginning to show up more frequently." There is further evidence of strong administrative support for work with young adults in the hands of adult librarians. He related, "We are also trying to shape film programs in branches for the young crowd, and we are having to work on our visual aid department to cast off some old prejudices about the film library. We have just had an interesting go-round on the film 'Phoebe,' for example. The visual aid department didn't want to buy it; we are at the point of insisting. Similarly with recordings, we find that our policy has been terrifically restrictive; we need to loosen up and buy for the young crowd."

With this kind of administrative interest and pressure toward widening access to books and information for young people, it is easy to see that one cannot equate the placement of the service to young people in a separate agency with the value attached to that service by the director.

Awareness of the importance of young adult work in cities with severe social problems is indicated by a metropolitan New England librarian as follows: "The Y.A. organization is essential in work in the 'inner City' with poverty programs, literacy programs, work with the drop-outs, etc. As such, the Y.A. staff needs support for expendable materials, clever publicity, and must have free time to work closely with A-V personnel, school officers, and community APAC personnel, etc."

An experienced Texas librarian contributed a sensible thought in writing:

Y.A. work must be continuously evaluated in terms of usefulness to present day youth. The needs, likes and dislikes of young adults are so constantly shifting that a Y.A. organization (collections and librarians) must be very flexible to meet these demands. In these days of the drop-out, early marriage, socially upsetting exposures, Y.A. librarians must be of the highest caliber if they are to serve all who need them . . . and this group is ever increasing.

Considering the responses to the questionnaire, how then would one summarize the trends in young adult services on the public library organization chart? In the first place, there is a strong consensus as to the need for the service as shown by the existence of an agency with a supervisor in charge to serve young adults. Further supporting evidence is indicated by the high placement of the agency within the library organization by about half of those responding. Reporting was



often to the director or the assistant director. It is clear also that service to young adults is integrated into the organization and that cooperative and consultative relationships exist with other areas of service. While there was no evidence of a great outpouring of funds for services to young adults, most of the libraries reporting said they had separate young adult materials budgets. Separate collections were indicated by about two-thirds of the responses, with the pattern being a librarian in charge of the central collection. The same proportion of separate collections was reported by branches but with fewer librarians in charge of the branch collection and services. Following the normal American tendency toward infinite variations in patterns of service, the target age group covered a wide range. But the general practice was for service to begin with early teens and end with the late teens; the idea of being guided by the age groupings in the schools was disavowed by most of the respondents.

Since I tend to be an administrative relativist, the comment which most appealed to me came from Florida. It read: "Interested personnel is much more important than organization of the work." This is not to say, of course, that the organization is not important. I believe if one went around to visit the libraries included in this study and many others under progressive administrations, one would find, with some notable exceptions, a high value attached to public library service to young adults. And this high value would be reflected by a respectable place well up in the organization chart, provision for adequate collection, space and staff, and a growing attention to the young people who are the most numerous and heaviest users of public libraries.

Do these findings justify satisfaction among young adult librarians? Or are they a challenge to young adult librarians to fight for a specific, fixed place on the organization chart? Should the content of the young adult program and the age group served be rigidly delimited? Should administrators feel guilty if they have not created an organizational structure and relationships along the lines that prevail in the supposedly more advanced libraries?

These questions will be answered differently according to the point of view, the experience, and the values and motivations of those considering them. It seems to me the time has come for a comprehensive study of library services to our multitudes of young citizens. Possibly this issue of *Library Trends* will provide the basis for such a study. The outcome might be agreement on the organizational aspects of

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the service. Or more likely, there will continue to be interesting variations. As a larger body of experience develops over the years, we may begin to see the sort of family resemblance among young adult services across the country that has developed in the departmentalization of libraries, the organization of work with children, and technical processing.

At any rate, we should be proud to have as professional colleagues a group of dynamic librarians who are contributing richly to the growth and enlargement of understanding among young people and who will contribute more as their numbers increase and their work expands.

### *References*

1. American Library Association. Committee on Standards for Work with Young Adults in Public Libraries. *Young Adult Services in the Public Library*. Chicago, ALA, 1960, p. 8.
2. American Library Association. *Minimum Standards for Public Library Systems, 1966*. Chicago, ALA, 1967, p. 42.
3. Wheeler, Joseph L., and Goldhor, Herbert. *Practical Administration of Public Libraries*. New York, Harper & Row, 1962, p. 362.
4. Bowler, Roberta, ed. *Local Public Library Administration*. Chicago, International City Managers' Association, 1964, pp. 245-248.